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May 28, 1975
No. 0511/75

Approved for Release: 2018/09/17 C03018460

Approved for Release: 2018/09/17 C03018460

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Approved for Release: 2018/09/17 C03018460

Approved for Release: 2018/09/17 C03018460

LATIN AMERICAN TRENDS

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Western Hemisphere Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

CONTENTS

May 28, 1975

Argentina: Restrictions on Press Freedom 1

NR

Approved for Release: 2018/09/17 C03018460

Approved for Release: 2018/09/17 C03018460

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Argentina: Restrictions on Press Freedom

On May 21 the Trends reported the details of an Argentine executive decree issued on May 14 forbidding domestic and foreign news media to carry news about Argentina supplied by foreign wire services. The decree has touched off a furor in Buenos Aires press circles. Editorial reaction zeroed in on the unconstitutional nature of the edict and generally echoed La Nacion's assertion that it is "ambiguous, arbitrary, and absurd."

The government responded quickly. A public service message, broadcast over government-controlled TV on May 18 and 19, warned that "subversive organizations are using some media in their efforts to influence the masses." Lest viewers have any doubts about which newspapers were guilty, the ad clearly showed someone buying copies of Cronista Comercial and La Opinion.

Moreover, presidential press secretary Villone, one of Lopez Rega's cronies, visited La Nacion, La Opinion, and Cronista Comercial to complain about their criticism of the government. He reportedly warned one writer of "dire consequences" if the criticism did not stop.

The government has already withdrawn official advertising from La Prensa, a long-time critic of Peronism, and La Opinion, which appeals to the left wing of the Peronist movement. The recent assassination of a writer for La Opinion by unidentified assailants also has shocked, angered,and frightened the journalistic community. The victim allegedly was a former member of the left-wing Peronist Youth and had once written an article making fun of Lopez Rega.

Mrs. Peron and Lopez Rega clearly have embarked on a campaign to bring the news media under stricter control, and offenders are likely to be increasingly intimidated

May 28, 1975

Approved for Release: 2018/09/17 C03018460

Approved for Release: 2018/09/17 C03018460

and punished by withdrawal of official advertising. During his first administration (1946-1955), Juan Peron brutally silenced or neutralized the country's two great metropolitan dailies, La Nacion and La Prensa. It is difficult to picture the present government following the same path, but as Mrs. Peron's economic and political problems worsen it will be tempting for a man of Lopez Rega's mentality to make at least a try at it. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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May 28, 1975

Approved for Release: 2018/09/17 C03018460

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Approved for Release: 2018/09/17 C03018460

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Approved for Release: 2018/09/17 C03018460

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Approved for Release: 2018/09/17 C03018460

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Approved for Release: 2018/09/17 C03018460

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Approved for Release: 2018/09/17 C03018460

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Approved for Release: 2018/09/17 C03018460

Approved for Release: 2018/09/17 C03018460

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Approved for Release: 2018/09/17 C03018460

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Approved for Release: 2018/09/17 C03018460

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Approved for Release: 2018/09/17 C03018460